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SUBJECT: IRAQ/IRAN: AMMAN MEETING WITH IRAQI SHI'A CLERIC
JAWAD AL-KHOE'I

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE, FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) Iraqi Shi'a clerical insider Jawad al-Khoe'i (strictly protect), outlined to Emboff his views on the current situation in Iraq and Iran (where he has been studying for ten of the last twelve years), political developments in the Hawza, and ongoing Iranian interference in Iraq. Jawad also discussed his recent meetings with Ayatollah Sistani and his son. Khoe'i asserted that Abdul Aziz al-Hakim is dying, and will be succeeded by his son Ammar, whom he described as "1000 percent Iranian." Jawad also commented on Qom-based Iraqi Ayatollah Qadhim al-Ha'iri ("Moqtada's Ayatollah"), Husayn al-Muayid ("not a player"), and on the attitudes of the Iranian public toward their government and toward the situation in Iraq ("no change in Iran will occur from within"). He called the U.S. "Iraq's light at the end of the tunnel," and outlined a variety of measures he thought the USG should pursue to promote its interests in Iraq and Iran. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (S) Emboff met recently for several hours with Jawad al-Khoe'i (strictly protect), the thirty-something nephew of Al-Khoe'i Foundation chief Abdel Majid al-Khoe'i (murdered in Najaf in 2003). Jawad requested the meeting at the suggestion of Al Khoe'i Foundation Executive Director and longtime USG contact, Ghanim Jawad (protect). Jawad al-Khoe'i noted that he has been studying in Qom, Iran since 1994 (broken by a two-year break in the 1990's, when he lived in London). He explained that he left Qom in May,

2007 to visit Iraq, Jordan, and other countries to discuss Iraq issues with prominent Iraqis and others. He noted that his meetings in Jordan included a private dinner with former Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, and a meeting with (unnamed) members of the Jordanian Royal Court. Jawad's comments are summarized below, those mainly relating to Iraq separated from those relating mainly to Iran.

II. IRAQ ISSUES

ABDUL AZIZ AL-HAKIM AND SON AMMAR

¶3. (S) Jawad said that he visited Abdel Aziz al-Hakim during May. According to Jawad, Abdel Aziz's cancer has metastasized, and he probably has only a short time to live. Jawad related that a rumor is circulating that "Abdel Aziz has been poisoned by the Americans," but said that Abdel Aziz himself doesn't believe it. Jawad opined that Abdel Aziz will likely be succeeded by his son Ammar (COMMENT: According to Emboff's local Iraqi contacts - both Sunni and Shi'a - Ammar has used his family's position and ties to the Iranians to amass great wealth over the last

AMMAN 00003057 002 OF 004

three years. He is frequently referred to by them as "little Uday." END COMMENT.).

¶4. (S) Jawad said that he has been a close friend of Ammar for many years, but warned that Ammar is "1,000 percent Iranian, both financially and mentally." According to Jawad, Ayatollah Khamenei referred to Ammar in his presence as "the great hope of Iraq." Jawad said that senior Iraqi Shi'a religious clerics do not take Ammar seriously as a religious or political leader, "but his backing is too strong." He added that Ammar is a close personal friend of Ayatollah Sistani's son, and is greatly liked by Ayatollah Sistani himself.

AYATOLLAH SISTANI AND SON MOHAMMED RIDA

¶5. (S) Jawad said that while in Najaf, he met with Ayatollah Sistani and his son Mohammed Rida. According to Jawad, Sistani commented that "the Americans know us well," and that accordingly "we should have advisors who know and research America." Jawad claims that Sistani follows U.S. political developments closely, and makes a personal effort to study the USA. While he acknowledged that "getting in touch with Sistani is a problem" for the U.S., Jawad claimed that the USG has used the wrong persons ("clowns") as messengers to Sistani, "people who mislead both Sistani and you." He asserted that the USG has repeatedly blundered in its Sistani dealings, especially during the CPA period.

¶6. (S) Jawad asserted that, as a result of these mistakes, Sistani is now convinced that ultimately "he is the person who really runs Iraq." In response to criticism over his alleged cooperation with Iran, Mohammed Rida cynically commented to Jawad that "if the Americans want to make deals with Iran, why shouldn't we?" Nonetheless, Jawad said, Mohammed Rida claimed that he recently had a "tough" conversation with Ali Larijani, during which he told Larijani that "Iran and Saudi Arabia are fighting each

other at the expense of Iraq."

POLITICAL LIFE IN THE HAWZA

¶7. (S) Jawad claimed that many in the Hawza oppose Iran's activities in Iraq and deeply resent the behavior of its agents and cronies. However, he described the Hawza as thoroughly infiltrated and intimidated by Iranian intelligence and its Iraqi allies. He stated bluntly as a major Coalition failing that "no reward or protection results from being a pro-Coalition/anti-Iranian Shi'a." In fact, he asserted, "the opposite is the case. Those who cooperate with Iran are well rewarded and protected, those who do not are sidelined, those who oppose are killed."

¶8. (S) Jawad asserted that "Iraq's light at the end of the tunnel is America," and called earlier USG mistakes "our tragedy more than yours." At the same time, he was scathing in his criticism of alleged USG failure to empower and protect its friends in Iraq, and argued for a strong, proactive effort in this regard. For starters, he urged that the USG begin the "long" process of cultivating and subsidizing pro-U.S. clerics and political figures, including creating and underwriting "charitable" foundations led by such individuals, which would assist in "the buying of Imams and their organizations, as Iran is doing (to the tune of \$20 million a month, he claimed), and you are not."

¶9. (S) Jawad argued that fixing Iraq is possible, but requires a thought-out, long-term, step-by-step approach, which he hoped may be possibly emerging. He claimed that an alleged American obsession with "quick fixes" is at the

AMMAN 00003057 003 OF 004

root of current USG problems in Iraq, and expressed concern that the USG may be intrinsically incapable of planning and committing itself to the kind of long-term tactical and strategic game plan outlined above. For the time being, he stated, the Al-Khoej Foundation will continue taking a low political profile in Iraq "because it cannot risk being the only bullfighter in an arena full of mad bulls."

AYATOLLAH QADHIM AL-HA'IRI: "MOQTADA'S AYATOLLAH"

¶10. (S) Jawad described Qom-based Ayatollah al-Ha'iri as "Moqtada al-Sadr's spiritual advisor," and added that Qadhim has a long history of association with al-Sadr's family, including his late father. Jawad noted that al-Hairi's office is immediately across from Jawad's place of study in Qom, and claimed to "unfortunately" know him very well. Jawad described al-Ha'iri as "a man of limited intelligence," who is "well-fed" by Iran. He added that al-Hairi is a "total" and dogmatic follower of the Ayatollah Khamenei.

¶11. (S) Jawad observed that al-Ha'iri is prone to virulent anti-American posturing, and confirmed rumors that al-Ha'iri has issued a fatwa calling for jihad against U.S. forces in Iraq should the current government be replaced by one that is not led and controlled by Shi'a religious parties. Jawad related that in May he witnessed a conversation in Qom between al-Ha'iri and two Iraqi religious students, during which al-Ha'iri countenanced in principle the killing of (notional) "pro-American" Shi'a figures, including clerics, on the grounds that these are "agents." Reiterating that

al-Ha,iri
is "Moqtada,s Ayatollah," Jawad opined that he has strong influence among members of the Mahdi Army, and as such, "you need to worry about him." On the other hand, Jawad claimed that al-Ha,iri is not close to al-Hakim or other ISCI figures, and would be unlikely to step forward in a crunch without the full sanction of the Ayatollah Khamene,i.

HUSAYN AL-MUAYID - "NOT AN AYATOLLAH, AND NOT A PLAYER"

¶12. (S) Emboff asked for Jawad's opinion of Iraqi Shi'a Cleric Husayn al-Muayid (sometimes referred to in the Jordanian press and elsewhere as "Ayatollah al-Muayid"), who recently relocated to Amman and announced the organization of a new moderate nationalist Iraqi political party. Jawad said that he knows Husayn well and had recently seen him in Jordan. Jawad decribed him as "a nice guy," but stressed that he is not a real ayatollah. He claimed that Husayn has little political influence, current or potential, and said that his his new party is basically a "one-man show." Jawad added that Husayn is married to the daughter of Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, while Husayn himself is the nephew of London-based Allawi supporter Hussein al-Sadr (not/not the same as Ayatollah Hussein al-Sadr).

II. IRAN ISSUES

¶13. (S) Jawad noted that he has spent more than ten years as a student in Qom, has extensive contacts with prominent Iranians and Iraqis living in Iran, and has done considerable traveling around the country. Based on this experience, Jawad offered some observations on internal issues and attitudes in Iran. He opined that most Iranians are greatly pleased with the "success" of Iran,s Iraq policy - including alleged disruption of Iraqi society and looting of Iraqi assets - "as they feel they are finally winning the Iran-Iraq war." In the same vein, he estimated that at least 40 percent of Iranians (mainly less educated people in rural and suburban areas, he claimed) strongly

AMMAN 00003057 004 OF 004

support the current Iranian regime, even if not pleased with some of its policies. Moreover, he claimed, Iranian society is permeated with informers and ruthless regime "enforcers" who move quickly to quash opposition political activity while allowing most non-political activity to proceed relatively normally, though in a substantially corrupt environment.

¶14. (S) Jawad called the Iranian Revolutionary Guard "Khamene,i,s strong arm," and claimed that it and Iranian intelligence are the two strongest forces driving Iranian policy. In contrast, he described Rafsanjani and his allies as "weak," and lacking an effective means of strengthening and projecting such influence as they have.

CHANGED IRANIAN BEHAVIOR "WON'T HAPPEN FROM WITHIN"

¶15. (S) Given this context, Jawad argued, near-term, radical, internally-driven political change in Iran is "impossible." He called assumptions that Iran will somehow moderate significantly if left to itself "delusional." However, he claimed that a strategy that combined some carrots with direct pressure on Iranian sore spots (including threats to commercial interests of the elite) and credible threats of worse to come could be effective. He claimed that the best way to change Iran,s confrontational behavior is through strategically applied, multifaceted external pressure on a wide range sensitive

Iranian "hot points."

¶16. (S) While noting that it might prove impossible to "break through the walls of Iranian intelligence," Jawad strongly encouraged continued economic pressure on Iran, especially targeting of Revolutionary Guard and other security force-controlled commercial interests; and USG efforts to support organized anti-regime separatist military activity by discontented Iranian minorities, especially Kurds, Baluchis, Turkmen, and Lurs. Jawad also argued strongly that the U.S. should be prepared to launch surgical air strikes against Iran nuclear facilities, energy, and/or internal security force (not necessarily Iranian military) facilities. He opined that if carefully timed and selected, air strikes will "terrify" the Iranian ruling elite, which he claimed (citing conversations with Rafsanjani assistants) has convinced itself that "the U.S. is incapable of hitting Iran back hard." Jawad also called for a focused USG effort to "cut off Iran's hands in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq." He also recommended that the U.S. initiate a comprehensive, nuanced PR strategy directly targeting concerns of average Iranians.

IRANIAN AZERIS

¶17. (S) Jawad contrasted the national minorities mentioned above with Iranian Azeris, whom he said are not particularly disgruntled as a group, do not feel oppressed by Persians, and currently display little interest in political autonomy, separation, or regime change. Nonetheless, he noted that Iranian Azeris do see themselves as significantly different from Persians. He opined that Iranian Azeris could represent another potential pressure point on the regime, though he said that they need a strategy tailored for them and should not be addressed on the same basis as the other Iranian minorities. He recommended that, if they haven't already done so, USG representatives seek out Hasan Shariatmadari, the son of the late Azeri Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, and obtain his comments and advice on a strategy for increasing Western influence on Iranian Azeris. Jawad offered to facilitate USG contact with Hasan Shariatmadari (now living in Hamburg), if desired.

¶18. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Baghdad.
Hale